

NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Reports a Dramatic Increase in Influenza Activity *North Dakotans Urged To Take Steps to Reduce the Spread of Influenza*

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health today announced that 1,077 cases of influenza have been reported in the state, significantly more than the total 625 cases reported last week.

“This is much earlier than we typically see influenza in the state, but it is not an abnormal time of year to start our season,” said Lindsey VanderBusch, influenza surveillance coordinator for the Department of Health. “Since the influenza season may very well continue for weeks, it’s important that everyone take precautions to avoid spreading the flu, including getting a flu vaccine.”

Influenza activity in the state continues to increase. Outbreaks have been reported in long-term care and assisted living facilities across the state, which often is an indicator that there are outbreaks of influenza occurring in those communities.

According to the Department of Health, the cases reported are only a small portion of the people who actually have influenza in the state. “Some people have mild illnesses and never seek the care of a physician to get tested for influenza,” VanderBusch said, “Even people who visit their doctor may not actually be tested for influenza. If the person has all the symptoms of influenza, a doctor may diagnose influenza without running a test and those cases are not reported to the health department.”

Influenza can be a serious illness for some people. Complications of influenza and pneumonia contribute to the deaths of nearly 400 North Dakotans annually, most of whom are older than 64. However, a large number of influenza cases occur in children younger than 10, many of whom require hospitalization.

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To help prevent the spread of influenza, the Department of Health urges everyone to:

- Get a flu vaccine if you have not had one this season. It's not too late since the season may last for weeks. Immunization is the best way to prevent influenza.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent all diseases, including influenza.
- Use good respiratory manners. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing.
- Stay home from work, school or recreational activities when you're ill. This will help prevent the spread of influenza to your friends, coworkers and family.

Common signs and symptoms of influenza include abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches, sore throat and cough.

For more information about influenza activity in North Dakota, visit www.ndflu.com, or call Lindsey VanderBusch, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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